

Winter 1986

## Thomas S. Noble: "Made for a Painter" [Part I]

James D. Birchfield

University of Kentucky, [j.birchfield@uky.edu](mailto:j.birchfield@uky.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/kentucky-review>

 Part of the [Art and Design Commons](#)

**Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.**

### Recommended Citation

Birchfield, James D. (1986) "Thomas S. Noble: "Made for a Painter" [Part I]," *The Kentucky Review*: Vol. 6 : No. 1 , Article 4.  
Available at: <https://uknowledge.uky.edu/kentucky-review/vol6/iss1/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Kentucky Libraries at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Kentucky Review by an authorized editor of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact [UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu](mailto:UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu).

## Thomas S. Noble: "Made for a Painter"

James D. Birchfield

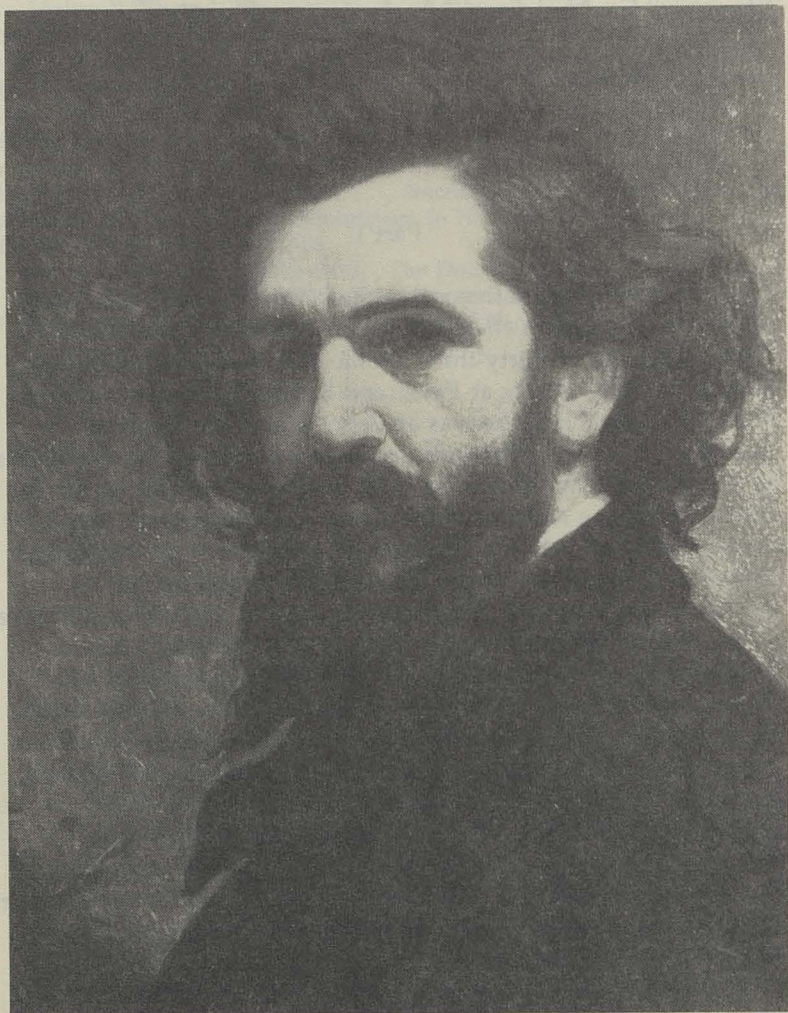
### Part I\*

Among Kentucky's native artists few, if indeed any, may boast achievements equal to those of Thomas Satterwhite Noble. In 1868, at the age of thirty-three, Noble had completed extensive European study, chiefly at Paris, and had established a studio in New York City.<sup>1</sup> Here he was an Associate of the National Academy of Design. His work had been included in the exhibitions of the academy and shown, as well, in Boston, in Chicago, in St. Louis, and in the rotunda of the Capitol at Washington. When, at the beginning of 1869, he became first principal of the McMicken School of Design, later under his direction to become the Art Academy of Cincinnati, Noble was destined to extend his influence as the teacher of Paul Sawyier (1865-1917), Kentucky's famous watercolorist; of Gutzon Borglum (1871-1941), sculptor of Mt. Rushmore and Stone Mountain; of Elizabeth Nourse (1859-1938), the Cincinnati painter who led a Parisian salon career; of John Twachtman (1853-1902), the American Impressionist; of Kenyon Cox (1856-1919), Joseph De Camp (1858-1923), John Ward Dunsmore (1856-1945), and others of regional and national importance. Following Noble's death in 1907, major exhibitions of his work, including over a hundred canvases, were mounted at the Cincinnati Art Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the St. Louis Museum of Fine Arts.

T.S. Noble was born in Lexington 29 May 1835, oldest child of Thomas Hart Noble, a prosperous hemp rope and bagging manufacturer, and Rosamond Clarke Johnson Noble. As a youth in Lexington, he attended the school of Mr. Merrick as well as the Preparatory Department of Transylvania University. His gift for draughtsmanship was in evidence at the age of six when he made a notably faithful drawing on his slate of the schoolroom stove, "accurate even to the cracked firepot."<sup>2</sup> His father discovered once

\*Part II will follow in the next issue of *The Kentucky Review*.





Thomas Satterwhite Noble, A.N.A., Self-Portrait, ca. 1867 (National Academy of Design, New York)

that he had remained awake all night preparing a drawn replica of Charlet's *Retreat from Moscow* from a popular print.<sup>3</sup> A columnist and contemporary on the Lexington *Daily Press* staff wrote in 1872 that "our young companion occasionally would draw upon his slate a group of boys as they sat upon the bench, and how readily we could recognize each picture. We then predicted this natural artist would make his mark in life."<sup>4</sup> Noble's interest in painting was further piqued when an itinerant artist prepared portraits of his father and mother. Noble received his earliest formal instruction in drawing from the Rev. John W. Venable, and he sold his youthful portraits and caricatures for enough to buy materials.<sup>5</sup>

While yet in Lexington young Thomas Noble would have been conscious of the art activity around him, and it is likely that he would have received encouragement from the professional artists in the vicinity. Joel T. Hart (1810-1877), listed in the 1838 Lexington directory as the town's only native sculptor, did not make his departure for Florence until September of 1849, after the Nobles had left for Louisville. Samuel Woodson Price (1828-1918), who would gain fame in 1849 with his portrait of William "King" Solomon, and who would later advance Noble from sketching to painting in colors, was nearby at Winchester. The foremost Lexington painter of the period was Oliver Frazer (1808-1864), pupil of Matthew Harris Jouett, Thomas Sully, and Baron Gros, and, more importantly, friend of the French painter Thomas Couture. Frazer was active in Fayette County from 1838 until his death, dwelling at Eothen (Malvern Hill), two miles out the Georgetown Pike from Noble's boyhood home. Frazer's friend G.P.A. Healy (1813-1894), also a protégé of Couture, was in Lexington in 1845 on a commission from Louis Philippe to execute a portrait of Henry Clay.<sup>6</sup> Two professional goals, both perhaps originating with Frazer, may have established themselves for Noble while he was a youth in Lexington: first, to affiliate himself with the National Academy of Design in New York (as Frazer encouraged Price to do in 1848, and as Hart had attempted in 1845); and, second, to study in Paris under Thomas Couture.

In Louisville the aspiring painter continued to nourish his interest in an art career. Price, busy at this period as a portraitist, moved to Louisville in 1851 to prepare a painting of A.L. Shotwell and his family. Noble, seventeen and active as a clerk in his father's business, studied in Price's studio in 1852.<sup>7</sup> In the winter of





*Noble-Yellman house, the painter Thomas S. Noble's boyhood home in Lexington, divided in the 1890s into two Victorian town houses now at 539 and 543 West Third Street (C. Frank Dunn Collection, Kentucky Historical Society, Frankfort)*

that year Joseph Rusling Meeker (1827-1888), an exponent of the Hudson River School and an Associate of the National Academy of Design, moved to Louisville to teach until 1859, when he moved on to St. Louis. Whether or not Noble became Meeker's pupil, he would have been keenly interested in Meeker's practices and ideas. And to heighten matters yet further, in the following spring, during the months of April and May of 1853, one of the



country's foremost painters, George Caleb Bingham (1811-1879), visited Louisville to exhibit his canvas "The County Election" at Hegan's store.<sup>8</sup>

At the age of eighteen Noble prevailed upon his father to permit him to explore the art life of New York. He wintered there in 1853, visiting the artists and galleries of the city. Perhaps Samuel Woodson Price or others arranged introductions on his behalf and guided him to the collections then accessible to a student. There are no indications in the records of the National Academy of Design that Noble was ever enrolled there as a student; when he became an Associate in 1867, it was on the basis of his training abroad and his subsequent professional recognition.

Following his New York adventure, Noble was placed by his father in a St. Louis business house to give him an alternative to painting. At the age of twenty-one, however, the artist was given the opportunity to travel to Paris to study. He arrived there in June of 1856 bearing a letter of introduction to the English-born American artist Edward Harrison May (1824-1887), a pupil of Couture since 1851.<sup>9</sup> May counseled Noble to select a master by looking at the works of those who taught in Paris. After viewing Couture's *Décadence des Romans* in the Musée du Luxembourg, listening to May, and thinking back, perhaps, to the conversations of Frazer, Noble asked the older artist to introduce him to Couture.

Thomas Couture (1815-1879), the teacher of, among many, Edouard Manet, Émile Zola, Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, William Morris Hunt, Eastman Johnson, and Enoch Wood Perry, began taking students on with the success of his *Romans* in 1847. He was therefore near completing a decade as a teacher when Noble was introduced to him in 1856. Couture's school was now well-established, as were the ateliers of various other masters, as an alternative to the rigid methods of the *Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*. This is well worth exploring, for the whole question of curriculum in art training has a greater meaning in the background of Noble than is true for many of Couture's pupils. Noble was to become, as principal at the McMicken School of Design and later as chairman of the faculty at the Art Academy of Cincinnati, one of the key figures in American art education in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Lewis Collins, it became Noble's "favorite theory that every manufacturing town should have an industrial school, and the



principal city of each state an art school, for the promotion of thorough art education."<sup>10</sup> What Noble experienced in his training in Paris inevitably provided the basis for his own thoughts on instructional methodology.<sup>11</sup>

The *Académie Royale* (later divided at the time of the Revolution into the *Académie des Beaux Arts* and the *École des Beaux Arts*) was established by Louis XIV in 1648 with the artist Charles Le Brun at its head. To Le Brun, the chief skill for the artist to acquire was drawing; the impact of this dictum was long lasting. Only a century after its founding did the *Académie Royale* permit a few of its chosen students actually to paint, copying recognized masterworks. Nevertheless, other institutions patterned after it throughout Europe perpetuated the *Académie's* most conservative practices. While the *Académie* provided the most prestigious place for study, excellent training went on as well in the private studios of able painters who essentially conducted independent schools, or *écoles particulières*.

The characteristic curriculum of an academy formed in the definitive French mold consisted of an "Antique Class" and a "Life Class." In the first, students perfected their draughtsmanship by sketching from classical sculpture or casts; upon advancing to the "Life Class," they were permitted to sketch from a male model. (The *Académie Royale* prohibited female models.) The rigidity of this formula produced a history of reactions and secessions embracing in no small way the *écoles particulières*. The Art Students League of New York, for a later example, sprang from dissent among students at the National Academy of Design. And, as we shall later see, impulses of this kind were not unknown in the Cincinnati of Noble's day.

It was into this rebellious milieu that Noble came when he entered the Paris art world of 1856. A contemporary description of Couture's Life Class conveys the anti-academic mood:

The 'life-school,' for his pupils, is in a large room, in an out-of-the-way portion of the city, filled with students from every corner of the globe, smoking, whistling, singing, and swearing; some industriously at work, with shirt-sleeves rolled up; and others with their hands thrust lazily into their great coat pockets, staring over the top of a forest of easels, at the model, who disrobes herself with perfect sang-froid, in an atmosphere of tobacco smoke.<sup>12</sup>



Thomas Couture's disposition was markedly *au rebours*. "As a rebel against all forms of science," he wrote, "I have never been able to learn by academic methods. I cannot say whether academic training was good or bad, for I never understood it."<sup>13</sup> His capacity for offending his more conventional contemporaries in the art world was particularly notable. It was apparent, too, that his students were in a sense "marked," and that they experienced a genuine alienation from the art establishment where exhibitions and official recognition were concerned.

Nevertheless, Couture's relationship with his pupils was warm and positive in a way uncharacteristic of the formal academies. His visits to the studio, trips with classes to the Louvre, and even excursions to the coast to paint were marked by a sense of bohemian *camaraderie*. Remaining evidence suggests that Noble's relationship with Couture was especially favored. When an older French pupil once remarked to Couture that Noble was getting on, Couture is said to have replied: "Getting on! Why that fellow was made for a painter."<sup>14</sup> Proof of Couture's continuing interest in Noble is provided in the master's correspondence with his American student as well as in Noble's effusive praise of Couture in a letter to Edward Virginius Valentine (1838-1930), another American who studied in Couture's atelier:

You will think this rhapsody quite youthful for a man of fifty. I know it. It is one of the few weaknesses of my youth that I cling to, and you will generously forgive it. It may be an illusion. Still it is delightful to me, and I cling to it. My love for him was for a lifetime, and I verily believe for eternity. As a man he may have had weaknesses. As an artist, to me, he was adorable, and is, and ever will be so long as I have a conscious being.<sup>15</sup>

Noble has been characterized as one of Couture's favorite pupils and as the "most impressive of Couture's American generalists."<sup>16</sup>

The three-year European sojourn closed in 1859. There are hints that Noble traveled and studied outside of Paris, perhaps, for example, in the increasingly important art center of Dusseldorf.<sup>17</sup> Possibly he took the opportunity to travel as widely as his means and his program permitted him, but his chief experience was his association with Thomas Couture. There are virtually no known canvases extant from this early European phase of his



development. It was, in fact, to be ten years following his introduction to Couture that he first publicly exhibited a painting in America.

Not long after Noble embarked for France his family left Louisville for St. Louis. By 1859, when the artist returned, Thomas Hart Noble had withdrawn to the country to Rock Spring, just beyond the corporate limits of St. Louis, maintaining a grocery business in the city.<sup>18</sup> The son returned to work in his father's trade, continuing to sketch (as shown by sketch books remaining from this period) and perhaps receiving occasional portrait commissions. His temperament retained something of the *bonhomie* of his days among the disciples of Couture, for William J. Hinchy, a St. Louis artist and diarist, noted in his entry for 7 March 1861, "Tonight at Sketch Club at oyster supper at Cantwanees where Noble was rather noisy."<sup>19</sup>

Less than a month after the Sketch Club's convivial oyster supper, South Carolina militia men fired on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, and the Battle of First Manassas followed in July. Noble was not an ally of the slave cause. Indeed, the sympathetic portrayal of black subjects became one of the chief preoccupations of Noble's art. At first the painter made no commitment to the fight, but he sided at last with Missouri and with the conservative element of his native Kentucky in the Southern cause. He enlisted at St. Louis for three years, and was assigned to the cavalry. In late October he was detached for service in the Ordnance Department at Camden, Arkansas, where he acted as a draughtsman, designing guns. From Camden he was transferred as a captain to the staff of Gov. Henry Watkins Allen (1820-1866) of Louisiana. Here he operated a rope walk to help supply the needs of the Confederate army and navy and built an early pontoon bridge. At the close of the war Noble surrendered at New Orleans. He was repatriated there on 10 July 1865.<sup>20</sup>

A newspaper report written not long after Noble's repatriation records that he had "returned to St. Louis with his portfolio filled with most valuable sketches of the war." "Mr. Noble," it continues, "is one of the best draughtsmen in this country, and we are confident that his war sketches are among the best taken during the struggle."<sup>21</sup> He opened a studio at 45 1/2 Olive Street and advertised as a portrait painter.<sup>22</sup> Also, while in St. Louis Noble made the acquaintance of and became engaged to Mary Caroline Hogan, whose father and brother were the owners of the



Memphis *Appeal*. She was sixteen and he thirty-five.

In October of 1866, after Mary Hogan had returned to Memphis, Noble re-established himself in New York, sojourning for a period at the Dodworth Building, 212 Fifth Avenue, with Henry Augustus Loop (1831-1895), who had also been a pupil of Couture along with Noble in 1856.<sup>23</sup> In New York, *The Slave Mart*, a canvas which Noble had been preparing in St. Louis, proved a sensational popular and critical success. Even a year later the art critic of *The Guardian* was upbraiding St. Louis for permitting Noble's departure:

In an early issue of the *Guardian* there appeared a criticism of a fine picture, *The Slave Sale*, by T.S. Noble which, as we anticipated, was allowed to be taken East, and the great work of art lost to St. Louis. Not only this but the author was also compelled, for want of patronage, to transport himself to another, and we are happy to state, more profitable sphere of action. By late accounts we learn that Mr. Noble has permanently established his studio in New York, where his productions have been appreciated as they deserve.<sup>24</sup>



The Last Sale of Slaves in St. Louis, after 1875 (*Missouri Historical Society*), a réplique of the lost canvas of *The Slave Mart*, 1866



In August of 1866 he had shown the six by eight foot canvas at Pettes & Leathe's Gallery in St. Louis, where the critic of the St. Louis *Times* devoted a full column to it as "the most masterly work of any western artist."<sup>25</sup> In New York it was shown at the Seventh Annual Artists' Fund Society Exhibition, held at the National Academy of Design in November, and then at Child's & Company's in Boston, where its purchase was urged for the Athenaeum. In February and March it was placed on view in the rotunda of the Capitol in Washington. "Mr. Noble is yet a young man," wrote the columnist of the New York *Sunday News* on the work's being featured beneath the Capitol dome, "but he has shown qualities in this picture which bespeak for him a prominent place in the ranks of the figure painters in this country." "No one," he continued, "whom we know anything about has, at his age, exhibited such power; and with his enthusiasm, keen appreciation of nature, ambition and brilliant genius, he may confidently aspire to the first place in the difficult path he has chosen."<sup>26</sup>

In August *The Slave Mart* was being shown a second time at Pettes & Leathe's Gallery in St. Louis. By the end of November it was at the Opera House Gallery in Chicago; it was also included in the Chicago Art Academy of Design Exhibition in March of 1868, and a campaign was set afoot to acquire it for the Chicago Historical Society. Within a short time the painting was purchased by William B. Howard, who made a gift of it to the Chicago Public Library. Because *The Slave Mart* is Noble's first important painting, and the one with which he launched his career, and moreover because the painting was lost in a Chicago fire, it may not be amiss to quote at length the Chicago *Tribune's* account of a work which excited more attention than any other work previously shown in a Chicago gallery:

About seventy-five figures are grouped around a parti-colored slave girl standing upon the auction block, at the foot of the Court House steps. Her hands are clasped, her head bent forward, and her eyes upon the ground, with a finely brought out expression of sadness in her features. . . . Immediately in front of the block are a number of negro women and children, in bright dresses, waiting their turn to be disposed of. On the extreme left an aged negro—one of the best figures in the picture—is bidding goodbye to his wife. Both have been sold,



and to different masters, and the parting scene is well wrought up. . . . In the immediate central foreground, a fashionably-dressed lady and gentleman, with a greyhound, are idly gazing at the scene. . . . There is an old gentleman who has purchased a donkey. There is a newsboy crying his papers in vain. There is an Italian image-vendor, and from the tray on his head the effigy of the dying Christ seems to look down upon the scene in sorrow. The architectural features of the picture are also suggestive. In the distance a church spire is towering heavenward. Upon the abutments are a statue of Justice skilfully thrown half in shadow by the painter, and a statue of Liberty, with head averted. There is hardly a figure in the picture that is not individualized and painted full of character. The coloring is very rich, and yet the general effect is quiet.<sup>27</sup>

After Noble moved to Cincinnati, the painting was lent for exhibition in the city's 1875 Industrial Exhibition. Following its later loss by fire, he sketched a smaller *réplique*, using a number of prominent Cincinnati figures (as well as himself, wife, and son) in the composition.

The trans-American celebration of *The Slave Mart* was followed by fully equal receptions for other major canvases on themes exploiting the evils of slavery: *John Brown Led to Execution*, *Margaret Garner*, and *The Price of Blood*. *John Brown*, for example, was taken from New York (where it was lithographed), to Boston and then on to Albany; it was also slated for exhibition in Chicago, St. Louis, and Cincinnati in 1868. The poet Whittier revised the lines of his poem on Brown after a view of Noble's painting, and a passage in his hand appears in facsimile beneath a print of the scene.<sup>28</sup> *Margaret Garner*, commissioned by Harlow Roys of New York, was shown in the 1867 exhibition of the National Academy of Design and then went to Boston to be shown with *John Brown* at DeVries's Gallery. *Margaret Garner* was photographed by Mathew Brady, and a wood engraving of it appeared, along with a story entitled "The Modern Medea," in *Harper's Weekly* for 18 May 1867. Although this work was a commission, Noble prepared "a cabinet-sized study from the celebrated picture" which appeared in an exhibition at Wiswell's Gallery in Cincinnati in 1868.<sup>29</sup> *The Price of Blood*, too, was shown in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and





John Brown, 1867 (*New-York Historical Society, New York; from a glass-plate negative in the possession of Jack and Jan Geis, Georgetown, Kentucky*)



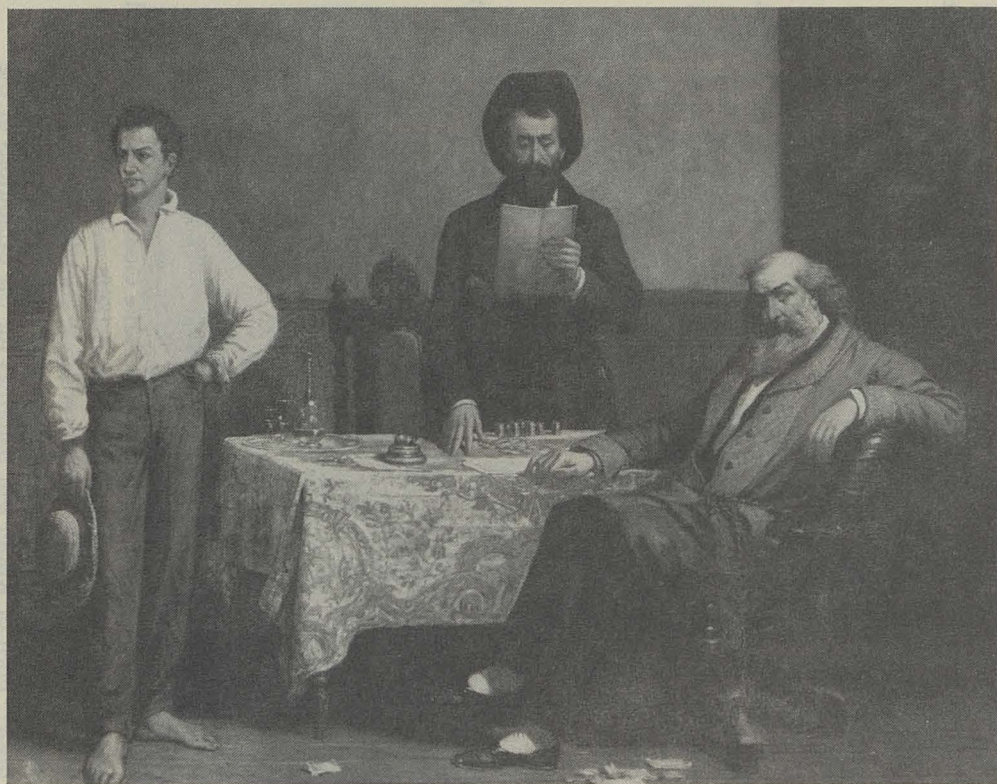
Chicago before it was sold to a Scottish art collector, A.G. McDonald, of Glasgow.<sup>30</sup>

Noble's practice of exhibiting his grander paintings in the major cities won him not only positive but widespread acclaim. Within a year of his move to Manhattan, Noble was elected an Associate of the National Academy of Design. The *Chicago Tribune* wrote that *John Brown* was "pronounced by competent judges to be the finest work of art ever produced in this country," and the *Cincinnati Commercial* termed it "one of the most important pictures ever painted in America."<sup>31</sup> In 1867 Noble was unanimously elected to the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, becoming its first nonresident member.<sup>32</sup>

Noble was establishing a circle of influential friends and patrons in New York. Near the end of his period of study in Paris he had shared rooms and established a fortunate association with a young American student named George Ward Nichols (1831-1885). Nichols, gifted both as a musician and as an artist, worked for a time under Couture in 1859 and on his return to America became art critic for the *New York Evening Post*, under the editorship of William Cullen Bryant, as well as for the *New York World*. In addition to writing also for magazines, Nichols was proprietor of the Crayon Art Gallery. As a dealer he was especially interested in the work of the French painters of the Barbizon School, but he also sought out such American artists as George Inness (1825-1894), from whom he at one time agreed to purchase every painting upon completion. Nichols entered the Union army in 1862, became aide-de-camp to General Sherman, and accompanied Sherman back to Cincinnati following the war. Noble learned much about the New York art world from Nichols, and Nichols took care to alert his old associates to the merits of his talented fellow student of Paris days.<sup>33</sup> Some favorable notices of the press may have resulted from Nichols's contacts, and Noble's commission to paint the portrait of Parke Godwin's child exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1868, as well.<sup>34</sup> Other early patrons of Noble include Harlow Roys, a leather broker with an interest in the Roys's Art Gallery, and C.E. O'Hara, a paper dealer, both of whom lent paintings for the exhibitions of the National Academy in 1867 and 1870.

The sale of *The Slave Mart* enabled Noble, after an engagement of three years, to wed Mary Caroline Hogan at Memphis, Sunday, 21 May 1868. (Nichols had married two weeks before.) The





The Price of Blood, 1868 (Grand Central Art Galleries, Inc., New York)

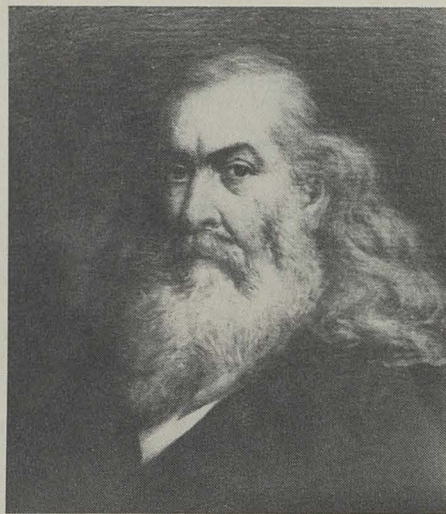




a



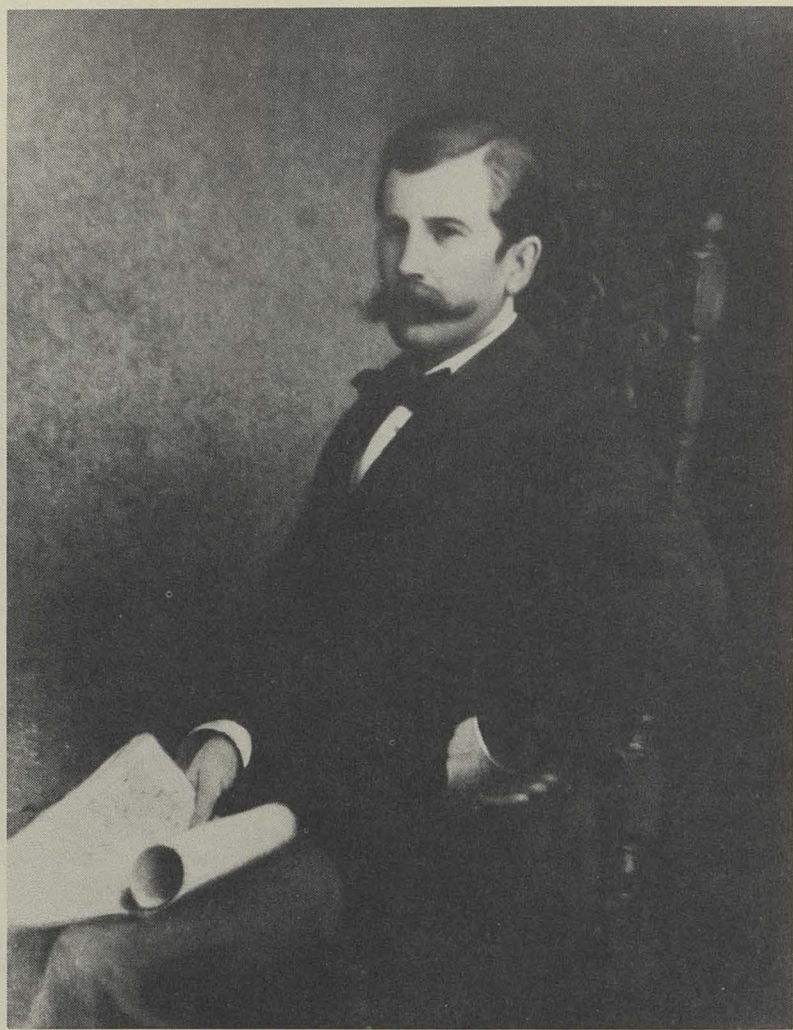
b



c

Analogues to a painting: a) Noble's black youth has been compared (see note 30) to Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*, ca. 1770 (Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, California); b) study head for the slave (Private Collection); c) Noble's portrait of Gen. Albert Pike, 1867 (Private Collection), the Harvard-educated Confederate officer who in 1868 edited the *Memphis Appeal*, owned by Mrs. Noble's family; his identity in the painting was hinted by the *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*.





George Ward Nichols, *ca.* 1875 (*University of Cincinnati Fine Arts Collection*)



Episcopal service was performed by the Rev. Dr. Brooks before a "large and fashionable assembly." One of various interested newspapers carried the enthusiastic headline, "Brilliant Event Last Evening at Grace Church. A New York Artist Marries a Memphis Belle." Noble, it reported, "has made his mark, and we hear with pleasure, of his works being sought after by such connoisseurs as have, within the past few years in the larger cities, given a new impetus to the growth of art in America."<sup>35</sup> The following day the Nobles left for New York. They honeymooned at Leeds in the Catskills, often visiting among the colony of authors and artists in the vicinity, including Nichols's friend George Inness. (From time to time, Noble was playfully encouraged to paint tiny figures into Inness's landscapes.) In the fall of 1866 the couple again returned to the city.<sup>36</sup>

Following his marriage Noble was eager to establish a reliable income. His dramatic paintings held a power "to attract curiosity and admiration in words, but not to command purchasers."<sup>37</sup> The Yale School of the Fine Arts was just being established at about this time and sought a member of the National Academy of Design to serve as Director and Professor of Painting. Daniel Huntington (1816-1906), president of the Academy, proposed Thomas Noble. Delays ensued, and no action was forthcoming from New Haven until mid-1869.<sup>38</sup> By this time another opportunity, in Cincinnati, had already captured Noble's attention.

Noble's *Margaret Garner*, which won him election as an Associate of the National Academy of Design in 1867, depicted a Cincinnati incident—the story of a Kentucky slave pursued into Ohio under the fugitive slave law. Rather than surrender, Margaret Garner killed two of her children to prevent their return to slavery; she then drowned herself in the Ohio River as she was being recaptured. George Ward Nichols probably facilitated the exhibition of Noble's cabinet-sized replica of this painting in the Cincinnati Academy of Fine Arts' first exhibition in 1868. *John Brown* was shown there in the Academy's second exhibition in November of the same year. These proved to be especially propitious inclusions, for the development of a major art institution in Cincinnati was soon to be afoot.

Charles McMicken (1782-1858) ten years before had left \$1,000 to the Ladies Gallery of Art for the purchase of a collection of casts from the antique. In 1866 two Cincinnati painters, Charles T. Webber (1825-1911) and Israel Quick (ca. 1830-1901), voluntarily





Wood engraving of Noble's Margaret Garner, 1867 (Private Collection, Cincinnati), after a photograph by Mathew Brady, Harper's Weekly, 18 May 1867



gave their time and criticism to those who wished to study drawing, using the busts for models. On 11 December 1868 the Trustees of the McMicken estate, urged by the enthusiasm of George Ward Nichols and that of his father-in-law, the art collector and philanthropist Joseph Longworth (1813-1883), determined to establish formally a professional School of Design as the first department of McMicken University (after 1871 to become the University of Cincinnati). At the suggestion of Colonel Nichols, one of the McMicken trustees, Larz Anderson (1803-1878), agreed to travel to New York on behalf of the institution in order to interview Nichols's promising friend for the position of Professor and Principal. Anderson was a native of Louisville, Harvard-educated and a brother-in-law to Longworth. The sixty-five year old emissary visited the painter's studio at 927 Broadway. When in the course of an agreeable conversation Anderson posed the question, "Now, what good would the study of art be to a farm boy?," he was delighted by Noble's practical reply. "It would help him to dig a better ditch and plough a straighter furrow."<sup>39</sup> The two reached an accord, and Noble prepared at once to resettle in Cincinnati before the first term opened on Monday, 4 January 1869. Noble's career was now to assume an executive aspect. The achievements following the remarkable *succes d'estime* of his celebrated early paintings would henceforth reach into the field of art education and academic administration. To the recognition of his skills as a painter would be added the progress of one of America's foremost art schools.<sup>40</sup>

Larz Anderson's query about the relationship of farming and the study of art foretold the emphasis on the potential commercial applicability of training at the School of Design. Nichols, very much in the *avant garde* of his day, was then immersed in the social and aesthetic themes of his British contemporaries John Ruskin (1819-1900) and William Morris (1834-1896). He envisioned in Cincinnati the same Arts and Crafts Movement which extended in England from the 1870s to World War I. In 1877 Harper and Brothers published Nichols's treatise *Art Education Applied to Industry*, illustrated with ancient and modern specimens of metalwork, textiles, pottery, porcelains, and enamelwork. As had Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) and Ruskin, Nichols found that the nineteenth century "attempted to put the machine in place of the man." "Art," he wrote in chorus with the Victorian socialists, "is not simply an amusement, an indulgence which delights the fancy





*Prof. Thomas S. Noble with a class, eating a still life, at the Art Academy of Cincinnati*  
(Cincinnati Art Museum Archives)



of the idle and rich. It is decidedly practical, and concerns the well-being, the advancement, the pleasure, of the laborer and the poor."<sup>41</sup> Consequently, Noble's pupils learned, as Morris would have delighted to know, the art of woodcarving, the designing of wall paper and carpet patterns, as well as sketching and painting. Noble's own daughter Grace became an adroit wood-carver, producing fine cabinetwork and picture frames, and Mrs. Noble became a skilled potter.

Nichols could take pride in the report of 1872 that claimed for the school nine lithographers, four architects, three civil engineers, four carpenters, four draughtsmen on wood, five machinists, six stonecutters, thirteen wood carvers, two cabinet makers, four jewelers, seven photographic retouchers, and twelve engravers, among other representative tradesmen, who felt that formal art training would enhance their skills.<sup>42</sup> Noble had not only studied with Couture and been elected an Associate of the National Academy of Design, he had designed weapons for the Ordnance Department of the Confederate Army, built a pontoon bridge, and managed a rope factory; moreover, he understood the business of the commission merchant and that of the wholesale grocer, as well. He was an obvious choice for someone who could reconcile aesthetic concepts with practical skills.

Although both Noble and Nichols knew the example of Thomas Couture, they recognized at once that the method of study best suited to the needs of Cincinnati's School of Design was not the casual individualistic experimentation which they remembered from the outskirts of Paris, with models disrobing amidst a forest of easels in a cloud of smoke. Instead, they instituted a formally structured curriculum at once sufficiently decorous and academic in character to win the approval of a practical community which passed daily by the school at the northeast corner of Third and Main. The Cincinnati of the 1870s was not, they acknowledged, the best site for a rebellion against the *École des Beaux Arts*. As the tastes and cultural needs of Cincinnati broadened and grew, Noble would appropriately adapt the curriculum of the school.



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Preparation of this study was aided by a grant from the University of Kentucky Faculty Research Committee. Two brief but well-informed essays on Noble are Mary Noble Welleck Garretson's "Thomas S. Noble and his Paintings," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly Bulletin* 24 (October 1940): 113-23 and Albert Boime's "Thomas Satterwhite Noble Casts Couture's Spell in America" in *Thomas Couture and the Eclectic Vision* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1980), 580-89. See also *Kunstchronik und Kunstmarkt*, Leipzig, 4 (1869): 112; "Thomas Satterwhite Noble" in Lewis Collins and Richard H. Collins, *The History of Kentucky*, revised (Covington, Kentucky: Collins & Co., 1874; rpt. Frankfort, Kentucky: Kentucky Historical Society, 1966) 1:623; "Thomas S. Noble," *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Kentucky of the Dead and Living Men of the Nineteenth Century* (Cincinnati: J.M. Armstrong & Co., 1878), 339-40; Robert Peter, *History of Fayette County, Kentucky*, rev. William Henry Perrin (Chicago: O.L. Baskin & Co., 1882), 375; Henry Theodore Tuckerman, *Book of the Artists* (New York: American Artist Life, 1882; rpt. New York: James F. Carr, 1966), 488; John Thomas Scharf, *History of St. Louis City and County* (Philadelphia: Louis E. Everts and Co., 1883) 2:1626; "Cincinnati Artists," *San Francisco Sunday Chronicle*, 21 March 1886; S. Tudor Delery, "Art and Artists of Cincinnati," *The Angelus Magazine: An Illustrated Periodical of Art, Literature and Living Issues*, November 1895, 83-84; Charles Theodore Greve, *The Centennial History of Cincinnati* (Chicago: Biographical Publishing House Co., 1904), 2:543-45; Mantle Fielding, *Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors and Engravers* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Subscribers [1926]; rpt. Green Farms, Connecticut: Modern Books and Crafts, 1974), 259; Ivan Wilson, *Biographical Data on Some Kentucky Artists*, M.A. Thesis, George Peabody College, 1933, 55-56; Thomas D. Clark, *A History of Kentucky* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1937), 378; George C. Groce and David H. Wallace, eds., *The New-York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America 1564-1860* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1957), 473; *Who Was Who in America* (Chicago: Marquis, 1968) 4:705; William Young, *Dictionary of American Artists, Sculptors and Engravers: From the Beginnings Through the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: W. Young, 1968), 339; Emmanuel Bénézit, comp., *Dictionnaire Critique et Documentaire des Peintres, Dessinateurs et Gravures* (Paris: Librairie Grund, 1976) 2:736; J. Winston Coleman, Jr., "Masters of the Brush and Palette," *Sketches of Kentucky's Past* (Lexington: Winburn Press, 1979), 228; Richard J. Koke, *American Genre and Landscape Paintings in the New-York Historical Society* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1982) 3:13-15; J. Birchfield, "Thomas Satterwhite Noble: Artist and Teacher," *Kentucky Expatriates: Natives and Notable Visitors* (Owensboro, Kentucky: Owensboro Museum of Fine Art, 1984), 49; Hans Vollmer, comp., *Allgemeines Lexicon der Bildenen Künstler* (Leipzig: Veb E.A. Seeman Verlag, n.d.) 25:495. Unpublished, but of interest, are biographical essays by John Ward Dunsmore and Grace Noble Anderson.



<sup>2</sup>Garretson, "Noble," 114.

<sup>3</sup>Manuscript, Noble archives. Nicholas Toussaint Charlet's *Retreat from Moscow* was first exhibited in 1836. For information on Noble's home in Lexington see "A Son of Lexington," *Kentucky Leader*, 23 December 1894; Bettye Lee Mastin, "Kentucky Homes," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 31 July 1982; Bettie L. Kerr and John D. Wright, *Lexington: A Century in Photographs* (Lexington: Lexington-Fayette County Historic Commission, 1984), 76.

<sup>4</sup>"Thomas Noble," *Lexington Daily Press*, 14 August 1872.

<sup>5</sup>*Biographical Encyclopedia of Kentucky*, 339; Lewis Collins, *History of Kentucky* 1:623.

<sup>6</sup>Boime, *Couture*, 580; William Barrow Floyd, *Jouett, Bush, Frazer* (Lexington: Published by the Author, 1968), 132.

<sup>7</sup>J. Winston Coleman, Jr., *Three Kentucky Artists: Hart, Price, Troye* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 31; Collins, *History of Kentucky* 1:623.

<sup>8</sup>Bruce Weber, "In Pursuit of Success: Kentucky and the Visiting Artist, 1805-1865" in Arthur F. Jones and Bruce Weber, *The Kentucky Painter: From the Frontier Era to the Great War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Art Museum, 1981), 28. Ironically, by 1866, a St. Louis critic would write as follows of one of Noble's paintings: "as a national picture, it ranks with the best of Bingham's. But, there the comparison ends. As a work of art, in regard to drawing and color, it is superior to anything I've seen after that artist. I draw the comparison to Bingham because, till now, he has been the best and best known subject painter in the West. Henceforth, the veteran talent will have to follow the younger genius." (Review by Alfred Jingle, *St. Louis Daily Times*, 12 August 1866.)

<sup>9</sup>"Arts and Letters in the Academy," *Cincinnati Tribune*, 24 November 1896; autobiographical manuscript, Cincinnati Art Museum Archives (hereafter cited as CAM Archives).

<sup>10</sup>Collins, *History of Kentucky* 1:623.

<sup>11</sup>For a discussion of the French academic methodology see Boime, *Couture*, Chapter 12, "Couture's Workshop," 441-56; Marchal E. Landgren, *American Pupils of Thomas Couture* (College Park, Maryland: University of Maryland Art Gallery, 1971), 9-18; H. Barbara Weinberg, "The Lure of Paris: Late Nineteenth-Century American Painters and their French Training" in Theodore E. Stebbins et al., *A New World: Masterpieces of American Painting 1760-1910* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1983), 16-32; and Nicholas Pevsner, *Academies of Art: Past and Present* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1940).

<sup>12</sup>Boime, *Couture*, 648, note 1.

<sup>13</sup>Boime, *Couture*, 444.

<sup>14</sup>*Cincinnati Tribune*, 24 November 1896.

<sup>15</sup>A.L.S., Cincinnati, 2 January 1888, Valentine Museum, Richmond, Virginia; quoted in Boime, *Couture*, 656, note 95.

<sup>16</sup>"The Academy of Fine Arts," *Cincinnati Commercial*, 15 November 1868; Garretson, "Noble," 114; Boime, *Couture*, 580.

<sup>17</sup>"Theatrical and Art Items," *Daily Times*, 19 August 1866. Both Landgren, *Pupils of Couture*, 58, and Mary Alice Heekin Burke, *Elizabeth*



Nourse (1859-1938): *A Salon Career* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983), 19, suggest that Noble studied at Munich early in his career.

<sup>18</sup>*Missouri Republican*, St. Louis, 21 August 1861.

<sup>19</sup>Transcription from Missouri Historical Society files. A detailed advertisement in the St. Louis *Guardian*, 30 December 1865, describes Hinchy's services.

<sup>20</sup>On 6 September 1862 Noble was enlisted by Capt. Lloyd for three years in Co. A, Third Regiment of Porter's Brigade, Missouri Cavalry. About 5 February 1863 this organization was merged, with others, into the Fourth Regiment, Missouri Cavalry, in which Noble served in Capt. Sappington's Company, Burbridge's Regiment, Missouri Partisan Rangers. On 28 October 1862 Noble was detached from his regiment by Major General Holmes for service as a draughtsman in the Ordnance Department at Camden, Arkansas. From here he was commissioned a captain and transferred to the staff of Governor Allen at New Orleans. At the war's end the governor's staff was disbanded, "and in the confusion that followed I surrendered as a private in Sappington's Company as at first enrolled." National Archives and Records Service; autobiographical manuscript and repatriation document number 557, Noble Archives.

<sup>21</sup>Unidentified news clipping, Noble Archives.

<sup>22</sup>Advertisements for Noble's studio appear in the St. Louis *Guardian*, 30 December 1865 (first issue) through 22 September 1866.

<sup>23</sup>"Fine Arts: 'The American Slave Mart,'" *New York Evening Post*, 22 October 1866.

<sup>24</sup>"Lessons in Art," St. Louis *Guardian*, 9 November 1867.

<sup>25</sup>"Fine Arts: 'Noble's Last Sale,'" 12 August 1866.

<sup>26</sup>"Art Gossip," *New York Sunday News*, 3 February 1867. Additional accounts of "The Slave Mart" will be found in "Home Art: 'Slave Sale,' by Noble," St. Louis *Guardian*, 7 July 1866; "Noble's Slave Sale," St. Louis *Guardian*, 21 July 1866; "Fine Arts," *New York Evening Post*, 1 February 1867, rpt. *Boston Sunday Herald*, 10 February 1867; "Art at the Capitol," Washington D.C. *National Intelligencer*, 23 February 1867; "St. Louis Artist," St. Louis *Guardian*, 16 March 1867; *Chicago Republican*, 4 December 1867; "The Artists' Reception. A Brilliant Attendance and Successful Exhibition," *Chicago Tribune*, 7 March 1868; "Noble's 'Slave Mart,'" *Chicago Tribune*, 26 March 1868; "The Exposition. The Art-Exhibition—Cincinnati Artists," *Cincinnati Commercial*, 19 September 1875; "The Exposition. . . . American Art Works in the West Room," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 24 September 1875; "Art Matters," *Watson's Art Journal*, 7, no. 17 (17 August 1867): 262-63; "Canvas of Last Slave Sale Here on Exhibit," St. Louis *Globe-Democrat*, 5 March 1939.

<sup>27</sup>"Amusements," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 November 1867.

<sup>28</sup>"Art Matters," *Milford, Massachusetts Journal*, 11 June 1867; "Art and Artists," *New York Advertiser*, 6 November 1867; "Art Gossip," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 9 November 1867; *Chicago Tribune*, 9 December 1867; "The Martyrdom of John Brown," *Boston Journal*, 17 December 1867; *Boston Congregationalist*, 19 December 1867; "Art Matters," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 December 1867; "John Brown," *Boston Journal*, 3 January 1868; "Art. Some New Pictures," *Chicago Tribune*, 12



January 1868, rpt. 13 January 1868; "Our Art Gallery," *St. Louis Home Journal*, 9 May 1868; "Art Matters," *St. Louis Home Journal*, 16 May 1868; *Daily Democrat*, St. Louis, 28 May 1868; "Noble's Historical Picture," *Missouri Democrat*, St. Louis, 29 May 1868; "Noble's Historical Picture," *Memphis Appeal*, 31 May 1868; "The Academy of Fine Arts—The Heroism of John Brown," *Cincinnati Commercial*, 15 November 1868; "Fine Art in Cincinnati: Exhibition of the Academy of Fine Arts," *New York Evening Post*, 1 December 1868; *Boston Journal*, 3 January 1869; "To the Editor of the Commercial," *Cincinnati Commercial*, 10 February 1869; "The McMicken Fund Matter," *Cincinnati Commercial*, 7 March 1869; Landgren, *American Pupils of Thomas Couture*, 58-59; Eileen Birk, "Current and Coming," *The Magazine Antiques*, 97 (April 1970): 504; Albert Boime, "À la Mode and Haute Couture," *Burlington Magazine*, 112 (September 1970): 649; Richard J. Koke, *American Landscape and Genre Paintings in the New-York Historical Society* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1982), 3:13-14. The Library of Congress and the New-York Historical Society each possess a proof of the lithograph of Noble's *John Brown*, produced by Endicott & Co. and published by the American Art Publishing Co. (That at the Library of Congress shows the Whittier verse.)

<sup>29</sup>"New York Correspondent," *St. Louis Guardian*, 27 April 1867; *New York Standard*, 9 May 1867; *Boston Journal*, 3 January 1869 "The Modern Medea," *Harper's Weekly*, 18 May 1867, p. 308, p. 318; the Harper woodcut is reproduced in Larry Gara, "The Myth of the Underground Railroad," *American History Illustrated*, 12 (January 1978): 39; "Pictures at the National Academy," *The Round Table: A Saturday Review of Politics, Finance, Literature, Society and Art*, vol. 5, no. 121 (18 May 1867): 310. Margaret Garner is illustrated in William C. Davis, *Brother Against Brother* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1983), 44.

<sup>30</sup>*Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, 6 October 1869; *Chicago Tribune*, 28 April 1871; "The Price of Blood," *Chicago Times*, 28 April 1871; "A Famous Picture by an American Artist," *North British Daily Mail*, Glasgow, Scotland, 16 December 1875; "Arts and Letters: In the Academy," *Cincinnati Tribune*, 24 November 1896; "Art and Artists," *Chicago Record-Herald*, 27 September 1908. *The Price of Blood* is illustrated in *The Magazine Antiques*, 121 (April 1982): 841 and in Davis, *Brother Against Brother*, 53. Peter S. Rohowsky, in his paper "The Price of Blood: Thomas Satterwhite Noble's View Into the Abyss of Slavery and the Slave Trade," discusses both *Price of Blood* and *Margaret Garner*; among other iconographic details, Rohowsky parallels the pose of the slave youth and Gainsborough's *Blue Boy* (courtesy grand Central Art Galleries). Gainsborough's work, in turn, is based on Van Dyke's portrait of the Villiers brothers. (See Jonathan Norton Leonard, *The World of Gainsborough 1727-1788* [New York: Time-Life Books, 1969], 83.)

<sup>31</sup>*Chicago Tribune*, 9 December 1867; *Cincinnati Commercial*, 15 November 1868.

<sup>32</sup>Lewis Collins, *History of Kentucky* 1:623.

<sup>33</sup>Boime, *Couture*, 557; "George Ward Nichols," *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934) 7:494;



"George Ward Nichols," *National Cyclopedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White & Co., 1907) 5:353; "George Inness," *National Cyclopedia of American Biography*, 2:490.

<sup>34</sup>The portrait was executed for the wealthy Parke Godwin, Princetonian (class of 1834), journalist, author, son-in-law of William Cullen Bryant, and briefly a lawyer at Louisville in the 1830s. See A.L.S., Noble to Godwin, New York, 25 January 1868, Bryant-Godwin Collection, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library and "Personal Sketches: Parke Godwin," *Chicago Tribune*, 12 July 1868.

<sup>35</sup>*Memphis Daily Avalanche*, 22 May 1868; "A Happy Event," *Memphis Public Ledger*, 22 May 1868.

<sup>36</sup>Garretson, "Noble," 115; Boime, *Couture*, 557.

<sup>37</sup>Collins, *History of Kentucky* 1:623.

<sup>38</sup>"Fine Art in Cincinnati," *New York Evening Mail*, 27 February 1869; William Lathrop Kingsley, ed., *Yale College: A Sketch of its History* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1879), 144.

<sup>39</sup>Garretson, "Noble," 118-19.

<sup>40</sup>Charles Theodore Greve, *Centennial History of Cincinnati* (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Co., 1902) 1:892; John B. Shotwell, *A History of the Schools of Cincinnati* (Cincinnati: School Life Co., 1902), 233; *History of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, Ohio* (Cincinnati: O.S.B. Nelson, 1894), 150; Charles Frederick Goss, *Cincinnati: The Queen City, 1788-1912* (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1912) 2:390.

<sup>41</sup>*Art Education Applied to Industry* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1877), 21.

<sup>42</sup>"Meeting of the University Board," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 21 February 1872; Russell Lynes, *The Tastemakers* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1954), 148-49.